

**Joint Legislative Oversight Committee for Health & Human Services, 10/11/11**  
**Kevin Campbell, Mecklenburg County resident**  
**Owner/President, Smart Kids Child Development Centers**

I am Kevin Campbell from Mecklenburg County. I am a state-licensed private-sector child care provider. We have been in business for nearly 20 years and serve at-risk children. We have three, five star centers in Charlotte and one four-but-soon-to-be five-star center in Gaston County. The centers are licensed to serve a total of 600 children. We have had More @ Four since it was first offered, with as many as eight classrooms.

I am personally involved with my centers on a daily basis and hold a level-three child care administration credential. I also served on the local More @ Four committee for several years. I hope that my 18-plus years of experience can be helpful as you deliberate the future of pre-kindergarten in North Carolina.

I am here today to recommend a delivery system for NC Pre-K that looks first to the private sector to serve at-risk children and then to the public sector to augment as needed. I believe that this approach serves children and families in their neighborhoods, retains and creates private-sector jobs, and solidifies the property tax base. I believe you will find that it is the most efficient and effective way to serve the most at-risk children, but I stress to you that it is not a given that this viewpoint is shared by all. To illustrate what I mean, let me tell you what is happening in my community in Mecklenburg County:

On August 17, WSOC-TV had a news story about Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) closing eight pre-kindergarten classrooms due to funding cuts. The story said, "Since CMS manages Pre-K in Mecklenburg County, school officials will decide which eight classrooms are cut based on geographical need."

Then, less than a month later, WBTV had a news story about the need to use mobile classrooms in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools due to overcrowding. It reported, "All the new Pre-K-8 schools have mobiles. Now students who learned inside a school building last year are now forced to learn outside in mobile classrooms."

Here is what these two stories did not tell you: The eight classrooms mentioned in the first story, those that were closed by the school system, were *all* Pre-K classrooms in the private sector. I know this very well because my center was selected as one with low need and we lost funding. That closed classroom is still sitting vacant.

The reason given for closing the Pre-K classroom at my center was lack of need or low number of children. Well, I can tell you that there is no lack of children – not in the Hidden Valley Neighborhood where my center is located and not in Mecklenburg

County. What actually happened is this: CMS is busing children to its own site which houses Pre-K.

For the Hidden Valley/ North Tryon areas, children are being bused to University Meadows Elementary School and possibly others. University Meadows Elementary has 10 to 11 Pre-K classrooms and uses more than that number of mobile classrooms. From the middle of the Hidden Valley neighborhood to University Meadows Elementary is approximately 7.5 miles in the most direct route – which includes traveling on major city streets and state highways. From the middle of Hidden Valley to my center is less than one mile and does not require even crossing a major street.

To summarize, a private classroom in close proximity to where at-risk children live was closed so that the same children could be bused at least an additional 6.5 miles on busy streets to a public school site that is using mobile classrooms for elementary-aged children! And while I am talking, let me add that the public schools hired two of my Pre-K teachers at the beginning of this school year.

So, from my view point, my center lost a classroom; my families were negatively impacted; and costs to taxpayers went up so that at-risk children could be bused farther from home to be taught by the same teacher they would have had teaching them in my center.

I ask you today: Does this make sense? Is it best for the children? Is it best for our local communities? Is it collaboration in the best interest of families?

As I stated earlier, I believe strongly that the private sector has done a good job and can continue to do a good job of teaching at-risk four-year-olds and preparing them for kindergarten. Any child care center that serves subsidized children that enrolls four-year-olds is already serving at-risk four-year-olds – and has been for many years. (The eligibility requirements are nearly the same for child care subsidy and NC Pre-K; they are based on the income of the families.)

Private providers have the experience and a proven track record. We have the community and family relationships. And we have shown we can serve at-risk children efficiently and effectively. Private providers are an important partner for the state in meeting its Pre-K goals. I ask today that we work together to serve the maximum number of children at a level of care that gives positive measurable outcomes – for families, for our economy and for our future.

Thank you for your time today. At this point I will stop and turn the floor over to the next speaker.